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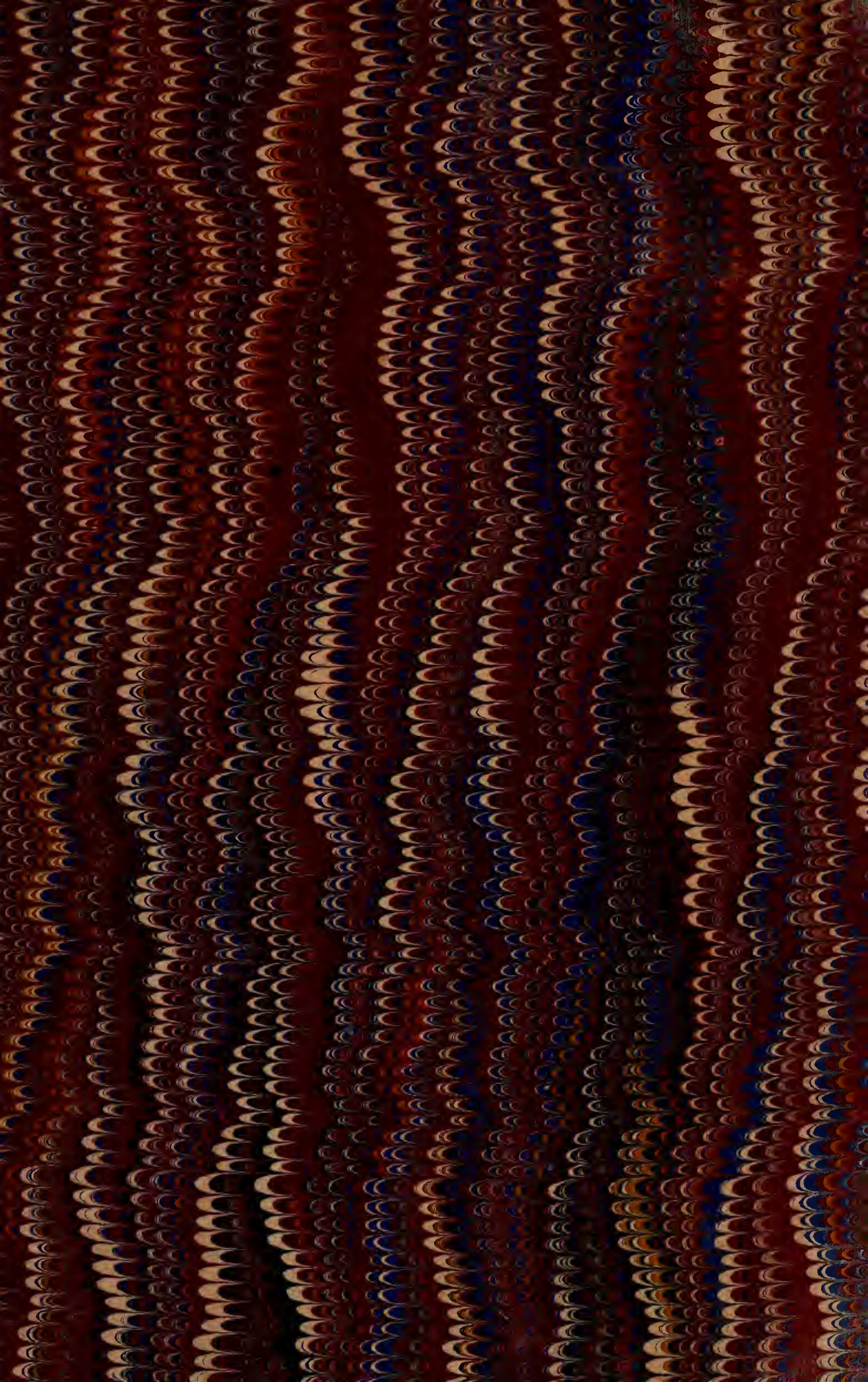


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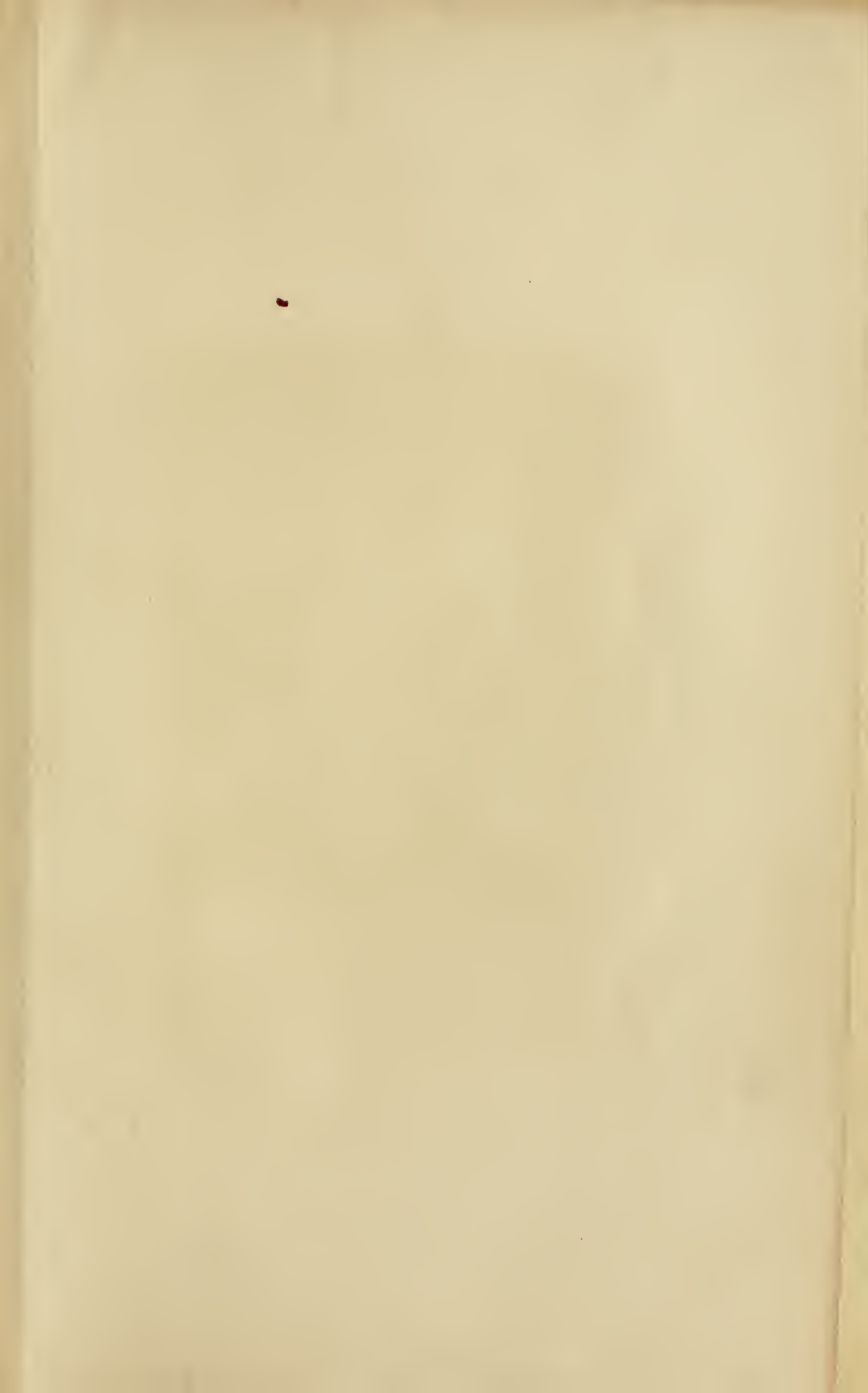
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



THE HISTORY
OF
A RARE WASHINGTON PRINT.

compliments of
W. S. Baker





This Wilson Plate "Painted from Life" by
His Excellency George Washington Esquire Commander in
Chief of the Federal Army
This Plate was first presented to the Congress of the United States of America,
by their Resident Agent, Chas. Wilson Peck.

THE HISTORY
OF
A RARE WASHINGTON PRINT.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
PENNSYLVANIA, MAY 6, 1889.

BY
WILLIAM S. BAKER,

AUTHOR OF THE "ENGRAVED PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON," "MEDALLIC PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON," "CHARACTER PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON," AND "BIBLIOTHECA WASHINGTONIANA."

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THE HISTORY
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A RARE WASHINGTON PRINT.

In the winter of 1778-79, General Washington visited Philadelphia, in order to confer with Congress on the operations of the next campaign, a comprehensive plan proposed by that body for the invasion of Canada, in co-operation with an army from France, being the principal subject to be considered. To this the commander-in-chief was strongly opposed, and the result of the conference was the abandonment of the design.

During his stay, which was brief (December 22 to February 2), the Supreme Executive Council of the State, in furtherance of a desire to have a portrait of him for the Council chamber, at a meeting held on the evening of January 18, 1779, passed the following resolution :

“ WHEREAS : The wisest, freest and bravest nations in the most virtuous times, have endeavored to perpetuate the memory of those who have rendered their Country distinguished services, by preserving their resemblances in Statues and Paintings : This Council, deeply sensible how much the liberty, safety and happiness of America in general and Pennsylvania in particular, is owing to His Excellency General Washington, and the brave men under his command, do resolve. That His Excellency General Washing-

ton be requested to permit this Council to place his Portrait in the Council Chamber, not only as a mark of the great respect which they bear to His Excellency, but that the contemplation of it may excite others to tread in the same glorious and disinterested steps, which lead to public happiness and private honor. And that the President¹ be desired to wait on His Excellency the General, with the above request, and if granted, to enquire when and where it will be most agreeable to him, for Mr. Peale to attend him.”²

To this the commander-in-chief made the following response :

“GENTLEMEN: The liberal testimony of approbation which you did me the honor of transmitting by the hands of his Excellency the President, coming from so respectable an assembly, cannot but make the deepest impression on my mind. However conscious I am that your generous sensibility attributes infinitely too much to me, my respect for you leads me to acquiesce in your request and gratefully to subscribe myself, Gentlemen, Your much obliged and most obedient servant,

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

“Head-Quarters Philadelphia, Jany. 20, 1779.”³

Shortly after sitting for this portrait, Washington left Philadelphia, his departure being chronicled in the *Pennsylvania Packet* of February 4: “Tuesday Morning (February 2,) His Excellency General Washington set off from Philadelphia to join the army in New Jersey. During the course of his short stay (the only relief he has enjoyed from service since he first entered into it), he has been honored with every mark of esteem which his accomplished fortitude as a soldier, and his exalted qualities as a gentleman and a citizen entitle him to. Among other instances he was welcomed at his first coming, by an address from the Supreme

¹ Joseph Reed.

² Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Vol. XI. p. 671.

³ Pennsylvania Archives, Vol. VII. p. 161.

Executive Council and the Magistrates of the City, and politely entertained by the President of Congress, the President of the State, his Excellency the Minister of France, Don Juan Marailles a Spanish gentleman of distinction and amiable character, besides the numerous testimonials of regard shown him by private gentlemen.

"The Council of this State being desirous of having his picture, a full length, requested his sitting for that purpose, which he politely complied with, and a striking likeness was taken by Mr. Peale, of Philadelphia. The portrait is to be placed in the Council Chamber. Don Juan Marailles has ordered five copies, four of which, we hear, are to be sent abroad.¹ His Excellency's stay was rendered the more agreeable by the company of his lady, and the domestic retirement which he enjoyed at the house of the Honorable Henry Laurens, Esquire, with whom he resided."²

Charles Willson Peale, the painter of this *striking likeness*, was a man of marked ability and ingenuity. At this time he was in his thirty-eighth year, widely known as an excellent portrait-painter, and, indeed, for some time, both before and after the Revolution, was the only painter in this country of any reputation. His first portrait of Washington

¹ While in all probability some, if not all, of these copies must have been made and the pictures in existence, yet we are unable to indicate the whereabouts of any one of them.

² It was during this visit to Philadelphia that the profile by Pierre Eugène du Simitière was drawn. The following entry in the diary of M. du Simitière, furnished by William John Potts, Esq., of Camden, N. J., from the original manuscript, is of interest, inasmuch as the fact that Washington sat to him has not heretofore been positively known: "Paintings & Drawings done. 1779 Feby 1st, a drawing in black lead of a likeness in profile of his Excellency general Washington form of a medal, for my collection. N. B. The General at the request of the Hon. Mr. Jay President of Congress came with him to my house this morning & condescended with great good nature to sit about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour for the above likeness, having but little time to spare being the last day of his stay in town." The drawing is not in existence, but the portrait is well known through engravings, the first of which was published at Madrid in 1781. *Vide* Baker's "Engraved Portraits of Washington," pp. 39, 41.

(the first authentic portrait) was painted at Mount Vernon in 1772.¹ This portrait is directly referred to by Washington in a recently-published letter,² dated Mount Vernon, May 21, of that year: "Inclination having yielded to Importunity, I am now contrary to all expectation under the hands of Mr. Peale; but in so grave—so sullen a mood—and now and then under the influence of Morpheus, when some critical strokes are making, that I fancy the skill of this Gentleman's Pencil, will be put to it, in describing to the World what manner of man I am."

A second was painted in the summer of 1776, when the artist was in the army as a captain of militia,³ and a third in the spring of 1778, commenced at Valley Forge, but not finished until later in the year.⁴ The portrait ordered by the Executive Council for the Council chamber, was probably the next, it being understood that in this enumeration oil-paintings only are included.

His miniatures of Washington, of which quite a number are in existence, are beautifully executed; the earliest was painted at Mount Vernon in 1772, at the same time of the production of the first oil portrait. Peale is said to have

¹ A three-quarter length, in the costume of a Virginia colonel,—blue coat, faced with red, and dark-red waistcoat and breeches.

² Written to Rev. Jonathan Boucher, and published in *Lippincott's Magazine*, May number, 1889, p. 731. See also "The Writings of George Washington," collected and edited by Worthington Chauncey Ford. Vol. II. p. 349.

³ A half-length, painted for John Hancock.

⁴ A full-length, said to have been painted to the order of Congress, but that body having made no appropriation for payment, the picture remained in the hands of the artist. It is now owned by Mr. H. Pratt McKean, of Philadelphia, having been purchased by him at the time of the dispersion of the Peale Gallery. Mr. Peale made several copies of this picture. One of these copies, captured by Captain Keppel of the British navy, in 1780, when on its way to Holland, has from that time been in possession of the Keppel family, Quiddenham Hall, Norfolk, England; a second, formerly the property of the Count de Menou, is now owned by the United States government; and a third, known through the engraving by Wolff, is in the gallery at Versailles. In all of these pictures Washington is resting by the *left* hand on a cannon.

painted fourteen portraits of Washington from life, the last in 1795, and of these he seems to have made many copies or repetitions.

The portrait now under consideration, a full-length, representing Washington at Princeton, the college buildings being given in the distance to the right, was placed in the Council chamber in the State-House at Philadelphia, where it remained until September, 1781, when it was totally defaced by some persons who broke into the building, whether from malice or a mere spirit of destruction does not appear.

The account of this act of vandalism in the *Freeman's Journal* of September 12, is decidedly original: "On Sunday the 9th. instant, *at night*, a fit time for the Sons of Lucifer to perpetrate the deeds of darkness, one or more volunteers in the service of hell, broke into the State House in Philadelphia, and totally defaced the picture of His Excellency General Washington, and a curious engraving of the monument of the patriotic General Montgomery, done in France in the most elegant manner. Every generous bosom must swell with indignation at such atrocious proceedings. It is a matter of grief and sorrowful reflection that any of the human race can be so abandoned, as to offer such an insult to men who are and have been an honor to human nature, who venture and have ventured their lives for the liberties of their fellow-men. A being who carries such malice in his breast must be miserable beyond conception. We need wish him no other punishment than his own feelings.

"The motions of his spirit are black as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.'"

And so runs the story. The portrait was painted, it was placed in the Council chamber, and it was destroyed. This would seem to be the end. But, fortunately the art and mystery of engraving in mezzotinto had been acquired by the painter, and in this case had been utilized in transferring the portrait to copper the year previous to its destruction, thus transmitting to us, through the intervention of printing, all the essential qualities of the original.

Impressions from this plate, taken by himself, were published in the latter part of 1780, but although many must have been printed and widely distributed, only three have as yet come to our notice. One of these impressions is in the collection of the writer, another is owned by the family of Robert B. Cabeen, of Philadelphia, and a third is in the "Huntington Collection," in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The illustration accompanying this paper is a reproduction from the first-named impression.

Mr. Peale was a practical man, and believed in letting the public know what he was doing, so we find the following advertisement of this print in the *Pennsylvania Packet* of August 26, 1780 :

"The subscriber takes this method of informing the public, that he has just finished a metzotiinto print in poster size (14 inches by 10 inches besides the margin), of His Excellency General Washington, from the original picture belonging to the State of Pennsylvania. Shopkeepers, and persons going to the West Indies, may be supplied at such a price as will afford a considerable profit to them, by applying at the South West corner of Lombard and Third Street, Philadelphia. CHARLES WILLSON PEALE."

This advertisement was repeated in September and December, when the price, two dollars, was given.

We imagine that the collector of the present day would willingly go as far as Lombard and Third Streets, Philadelphia, could he secure a copy at that price.

The print, which is dedicated to the "Honorable the Congress of the United States of America, By their obedient servant, Cha^s Willson Peale," does not give the entire figure of the painting, but with that exception it is doubtless a faithful reproduction of the original, which must have been one of Mr. Peale's best efforts. The picture, representing the commander-in-chief in full uniform, standing and resting by the right hand on a cannon, is good in composition, the drawing excellent, the figure well posed, easy, and graceful, and the general effect pleasing. The face is rather longer

than we are accustomed to seeing in other paintings and prints, but it has every appearance of being a likeness.¹

A description of the personal appearance of Washington, written about three months after the picture was painted, will be of interest in this connection.

“General Washington is now in the forty-seventh year of his age; he is a tall, well-made man, rather large boned, and has a tolerably genteel address: his features are manly and bold, his eyes of a blueish cast and very lively; his hair a deep brown, his face rather long and marked with the small pox; his complexion sun-burnt and without much color, and his countenance sensible, composed and thoughtful; there is a remarkable air of dignity about him, with a striking degree of gracefulness.”²

This is the second engraved portrait of Washington produced by Mr. Peale, the first having been executed in 1778, two years earlier. From this plate, however, no impressions are known, the information as to its production being obtained from his manuscript note-book, as follows: “Oct. 16. 1778. Began a drawing in order to make a metzotinto of Gen^l Washington. Got a plate of Mr. Brooks and in pay I am to give him 20 of the prints in the first 100 struck off. Nov. 15. Began to print off the small plate of Gen^l Washington. 16th. Continued the same business all day; of prints gave one dozen to those I wish to compliment,³ and sold 11 Doz. at Five Dolls.”

¹ In this picture, as stated, Washington is resting by the *right* hand on a cannon; in the picture painted to the order of Congress, referred to in the note on page 6, the pose is reversed, the *left* hand being placed on the piece.

² From “A Sketch of Mr. Washington’s Life and Character,” forming the contents of an anonymous letter dated Maryland, May 3, 1779, and published at London the following year. The letter was written by John Bell, Esq., of Maryland, to a friend in England, and the sketch is the first biographical notice of Washington of any consequence which has come to our knowledge. It was reprinted at Philadelphia, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of November 28, 1781.

³ From the following entry in the diary of M. du Simitière, referred to in a preceding note, p. 5, that artist was the recipient of one of these complimentary prints: “Curiosities and Books by whom given.

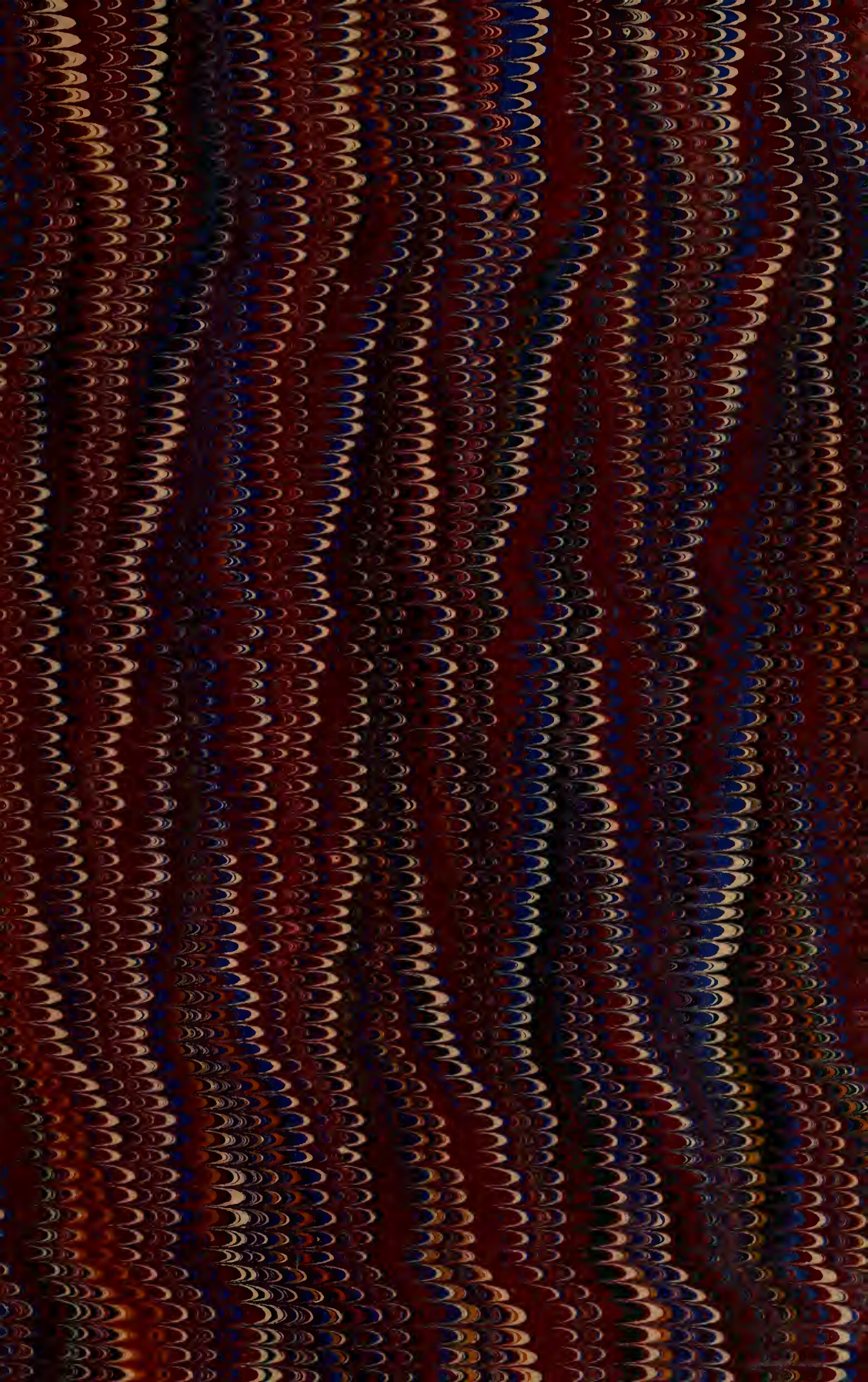
A third plate was executed in 1787, from a bust portrait painted at Philadelphia in July of that year, during the sitting of the Constitutional Convention. Impressions from this plate have now become extremely rare. The print is well known, however, through a copy made in 1865 by John Sartain, mezzotinto engraver.

Besides the Washington plates, Mr. Peale engraved a bust portrait of Franklin, one of Lafayette, another of the Rev. Joseph Pilmore, and a full-length of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham. The latter, his first plate, was probably engraved in London in 1770. All of the Peale plates are creditable examples of engraving, the Washington of 1780 being one of the best and most important.

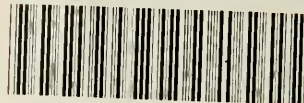
Charles Willson Peale has the enviable distinction of having painted the first authentic portrait of Washington; to this may now be added the honor of having produced the first engraved portrait of Washington from an authentic original.

Feby. 1779. A small mezzotinto of the head of Gen. Washington done by Mr. Peale painter of this city, given by him." Mr. Peale also gave him a copy of the print of 1780: "Curiosities natural & artificial by whom given. May 1781, a mezzotinto print of General Washington, poster size done by Mr. Ch. Wilson Peale from a painting of his own the gift of the author."





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